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ABSTRACT

A Boston pageant, "Cave Life to City Life," created in 1920 as part of a city-wide reform effort, called "Boston-1915," is discussed. This pageant, typical of hundreds produced during the Progressive Era, was meant as an artistic and teaching vehicle for the community to address serious social problems. Social workers, civic leaders, and innovators in education, theater, dance, and music joined forces to produce these huge spectacles as a way of facilitating change and making art an integral part of everyone's life. The extensive planning of "Cave Life to City Life," and the four episodes into which the pageant was divided are described. Pageants created in other U.S. cities during this era are discussed, as well as the role of pageantry in the context of the Progressive Era. Secondary social studies teachers interested in teaching about the Progressive Era of U.S. history can use the information presented for classroom instruction. (DB)

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PAGENTRY AND PROGRESSIVISM: A CASE STUDY

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PAGEANTRY AND PROGRESSIVISM: A CASE STUDY
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This paper will focus on a Boston pageant, Cave Life to City Life, created in 1910 as part of a city-wide reform effort, called "Boston-1915." This pageant, typical of hundreds produced during the Progressive Era, was meant as an artistic and didactic vehicle for the community, using creative expression in music, dance, and theater to reflect and address serious problems related to immigration, housing, transportation, education, recreation, political corruption and public health. Social workers, civic leaders and innovators in education, theater, dance, music - many involved in various reform efforts of the Progressive Era - joined forces to produce these huge spectacles as a way of facilitating change and making art an integral part of everyone's life. Their record was mixed although their attempt provides a provocative view of art as a political, economic and social tool. The research is based on the material developed for American Pageantry: A Movement for Art and Democracy, to be published in April, 1990 (UMI Research Press) and supported in part by an NEH grant.

A year before the pageant Cave Life to City Life was produced, a group of Boston's leading citizens decided the only way of instituting any of the necessary reforms was to bring all segments of the population together in a cooperative effort. They began by grouping over 1,200 organizations into thirteen categories: Business, Charity

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and Correctional, Educational, Health and Labor, Neighborhood, Youth and Co-Operative. Representatives from each category were chosen to sit on a central committee called "Boston-1915" whose mandate was to set change in motion with the goal of significant improvements by the year 1915.

One way the central committee of "Boston-1915" mobilized people to address the various concerns of the city as they saw it, was to set in motion conferences for each of the thirteen categories of organizations. Each conference was to survey the issues they wanted to address and develop an agenda for action. Several examples will illustrate how this process worked.

The Education Conference developed an agenda with specific concerns: education of immigrant children, construction of schoolhouses, industrial and vocational education. The Charities and Correction Conference formed two subcommittees; one to work on the issue of delays in court procedure related to criminal and civil cases and the other for the purpose of pursuing the Workmen's Compensation Act. This conference also commissioned a survey to outline the overall civic needs of Boston. The Civic Conference established a plan for a Bureau of Municipal Research, and developed committees to coordinate metropolitan districts and abolish preferential voting. The Health Conference recommended the establishment of a Bureau of Child Hygiene. Several leaders of the Health Conference were also involved in hearings that took place at Boston City Hall regarding disposal of garbage and refuse. The Neighborhood Work Conference, representing the thirty three settlement houses that existed in Boston in 1910, was organized to share ways in which social workers could

better serve the needs of their constituencies; overcrowding, health hazards, and other related problems caused by industrialization and immigration. The Youth Conference addressed the development of proper recreational opportunities and facilities. Dirty overcrowded streets and tenements allowed for poor play space. Parents overburdened with many children, heavy work schedules and low wages had little spare time. Immigrant children from American rural areas or small villages from other countries needed leadership in the use of leisure time in a foreign environment and teenagers working long hours in routine factory jobs required outlets for their energies.

The pageant Cave Life to City Life was considered integral to the reform efforts, and the Executive Director of "Boston-1915", James P. Munroe, served as one of the pageant directors. Rehearsals began during the summer of 1910 and involved children and adults from the entire Boston metropolitan area. Originally planned for a cast of 1,000, reports of that time indicated that the final cast consisted of about 1,500 and hundreds who wanted to participate were turned away. Three performances in the Boston Arena were originally planned for November 10. 11, 12 and because of great interest an additional fourth performance was added, with attendance recorded at about 4,000 for each show.

> I show the progress of the human race
> From darksome caves man's spirit led him up,
> By slow degrees, unto a high estate,
> Through storm and stress and struggle unto peace-
> Time works for good.

These were the stirring words delivered by Father Time in the beginning prologue of the pageant as he invited "Labor, Progress, Success, Prosperity, Peace and Happiness" to assist man in his work.

The first stanza of the prologue immediately set the tone for the pageant by establishing the ideas, that given time and effort, society could be improved.

The pageant was divided into four episodes, and rather than depicting history through the heroic actions of individuals, the emphasis was on progress through community interaction and cooperation. The caveman in Episode I was shown with his family "cooking their meal over the first hearthstone." The Indians in the second episode, Iroquois from reservations in Western New York and Canada, were seen in group activities-pitching tents, dancing and singing - and in the third episode the colonists were introduced "who sought freedom in the new land." They settled the land with the help of friendly Indians who joined them in repelling the "enemy" Indians. Early colonists were portrayed working together and establishing homes in the wilderness while overcoming hardship through group effort. In the last section of Episode III the colonists have an elaborate celebration in honor of Governor Wentworth's wedding.

Episode IV was the longest and most important part of Cave Life to City Life. Its opening scene was "Contrasts of the past and present in Communication, Travel, Education and Industry." A colonial town crier carried his candle lantern, followed by a group of Boston newsboys "during whose progress across the floor the stereopticon pictures the wireless telegraph....symbolizing the history and development of communication." The colonists reappeared as if going to the Governor's wedding in their coaches; juxtaposed against that was the latest model of an electric automobile, while "the stereopticon displays an aeroplane overhead." An old-fashioned school

where pupils recited catechism and the three R's was contrasted with a group of seventy-five high-school girls "who went through the gymnastic work of the school of today." A group of spinners was shown against a picture of a modern factory "and suggests something of the improvement possible in these same conditions so far as they have been made up to the present year."

Episode IV continued as a group of dancers impersonating Dust Clouds and Disease Germs attacked "Boston and Her Neighbors" and were repelled by the Knights of Economy. The Boy Scouts were shown driving out Crime and Insanity. A figure representing Peace advanced to give her banner to War; Labor and Capital were brought together "by means of blind Justice, led by Progress." The last scene of this episode was called "The Assimilation of the Nations (Sweden, Russia, Southern Europe, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Scotland, England, Ireland, Greece)." Each group danced a few measures "of their national or symbolic dances, followed by an American dance. The pageant closed with a symbolic dance "Aspiration," followed by "Patriotic Hymns by audience, chorus and pageanteers."

If Cave Life to City Life had been created as an isolated event it could be seen as a simplistic overview of history related only superficially to diverse issues of reform. What must be kept in mind is that many of those who participated in and saw the pageant had been involved in numerous committees, subcommittees and conferences developed by the directors of "Boston-1915." It is likely that they were stirred and moved by the symbolism, which was simple and direct, and understood that underlying each symbol lay a multitude of problems which were being addressed in the reform effort. The power of the

pageant lay in its ability to compress in a few dynamic images the complex process of change that all the organizations involved in "Boston-1915" were trying to set in motion. The pageant was also an attempt to validate the basic underlying premise of the entire reform effort, that cooperation and education would create the necessary positive environmental conditions for overcoming obstacles.

There was a strong belief on the part of the organizers that as the pageant was planned, rehearsed and performed, various groups in Boston would get to know each other and understand the problems facing the city they all shared. Protestants, Jews and Catholics who might have prejudices based on lack of familiarity would laugh, sing and dance together. Middle-class young people from the Curry School of Expression performed as Dust Clouds and Disease Germs alongside immigrants from Hale House, who depicted Flames. Sons of Veterans were listed on the program in the role of War. They stood side by side with workers from the Central Labor Union who depicted Strife, Slavery and Serfdom. The elite students from the Latin Girls School, as "the Greek element in Athens of America" danced next to Russian immigrants from the Elizabeth Peabody House. The Allston Women's Club participated in a minuet and the Boston Teacher's Club dramatized The City of the Future. Industry was represented by spinners from the Girls High School of Practical Arts. "Women colonists" were members of the Old South Historical Society and the Young Women's Christian Union and "colonial workmen" were students from English High School and Mechanical Arts High School.

One reviewer wrote about the pageant, "Commonwealth Avenue and Beacon Street met with the North and West End." Cave Life to City

Life was meant to inform the people of Boston, excite their imagination, and create what the "Boston-1915" committee called the proper "state of mind." If the right "state of mind" could be achieved for the city, then reform would be a natural occurrence.

This analysis of the Boston pageant is based on newspaper reports, the script and articles in New Boston, a magazine issued by the Boston-1915 committee. It is suggested that further research would be valuable from the perspective of those who did not participate, who were more militant in their rejection of evolutionary change and establishment leadership and who diverged ideologically from those who saw themselves as carrying the banners of progressive reform. Further research could also be conducted on specific legislation and institutional change that occurred in Boston during the period 1910 through 1915 and related directly to the "Boston-1915" effort. Cave Life to City Life was the product of a particular group of passionate people who felt the performing arts could play an important role in making the world a better place in partnership with other changes in society. Quantifying the results of an artistic experience proves difficult under the best of circumstances. It is likely that the act and process of joining forces in a symbolic event achieved through hours of rehearsal and the intimate act of singing and laughing together had a power nothing else could have.

Cave Life to City Life was the first of many pageants during the period 1910-1921 which reflected diverse reform issues and became an integral part of the Progressive Era's mandate for change. There were many suffrage pageants which received considerable press attention and engaged many as audience and participants. The St. Louis Pageant and

Masque (1914) attracted audiences of about half a million and involved about 7,500 participants. Organizers credited this production with directly influencing passage of a new city charter. The Pageant of Thetford (1911), supported by the Russell Sage Foundation, was credited with significant reforms in solving problems facing the six participating rural communities. One result was increased unification of these six small towns in seeking advice and help in developing and learning new ways of dealing with new machinery and corporate marketing techniques so that they could compete and survive.

The Pageant of Sunshine and Shadow (1916) commissioned by the National Child Labor Committee, showed the plight of child laborers and the overall theme was the exploitation of youth. The Paterson Strike Pageant (1913) became one of the landmark public statements against capitalist oppression and called for major reforms in our political and economic system. In this case the pageant form proved to be a powerful vehicle for militant strikers and the leaders of the IWW.

The majority of American pageants from 1910 through 1921 were created on the premise that a better America was based on enlightened democracy - which meant educated participation by individuals in the life of the community. One of the best ways to achieve democracy, they felt, was to create "art of the people, by the people, for the people." It was the first time in American history that such a diverse group had put forward the concept that art was integral to, and a basic element of, the democratic process.

Pageant leaders organized the American Pageant Association (APA) in 1913 as the new theatrical form became widespread. A utopian spirit

pervaded their first meeting as they talked about pageants - popular spectacles - an art form that involved entire communities. Various members of the APA had their own agendas in creating pageants: the educators thought immigrants would absorb language and history while learning democratic principles of cooperation and self-government. They saw the pageant as symbolic of general educational reform which emphasized play, imagination and experience as opposed to traditional rote methods of learning. Settlement house workers found pageants to be a good vehicle for their constituencies to take pride in their own customs while absorbing and participating in the customs and ideas of their new heritage. The artist members of the APA saw pageants as a catalyst to develop audiences and introduce dance, theater and music originating in American rhythms and energies. Civic leaders saw the productions as a way of bridging barriers between the rich and poor and also including patriotic values.

The American pageants of this period were secular works of art conceived on an enormous scale for a mass audience. They were designed to counter commercial entertainments and were meant as community rituals; with a moral and spiritual message for constructive and creative use of leisure time. It was the community, organized into numerous committees, that democratically determined funding, costuming, publicity and even the pageant scripts themselves. The community members were the dancers, singers, actors, stage designers, prop makers, historical researchers and audience.

The increase in the number of pageants during the second decade of the twentieth century was directly related to the escalation of other unified coalition reform efforts that characterized the Progressive

Era. In 1913 there were forty-six pageants produced in fifteen different states and in 1916 the state of Indiana alone produced forty-five. By the early 1920s the character and intention of the American pageant had changed. Just as the early pageants reflected various issues that troubled America during its first two decades the later pageants retreated from these concerns. The scripts began to appear simplistic and no longer involved entire communities in the entire process.

The decline of optimism that shaped the reforms of the Progressive Era was tied to the decline of American pageantry. In addition the spirit and the message of unity and patriotism in the scripts became linked with a view of America skewed toward the principles of unity fervently espoused by those who were predominantly white Anglo-Saxons. Many of their pageants did not recognize conflicting views of history, and their concept of democracy was not extended to include American Indians or African Americans. America, the land of the free, the home of the brave, was an image that became tarnished when juxtaposed with existing conditions.

For about a decade American pageants were a vehicle for a passionate group of people who saw themselves as reformers. Their view of change ultimately seemed a support for the status quo, but during the height of the movement they were successful in breaking down barriers and creating awareness within many communities. Above all, in America they forged a pathway for "making art" at the grass roots level and showing that creative expression could be a serious and meaningful endeavor on a mass level.